DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 651 CG 011 236

AUTHOR Gilbert, Lucia A.; And Others
TITLE Clarification of the Bem Sex Role Inventory.
PUB DATE Sep 76
NOTE 16p.; Best copy available; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (84th, Washington, D.C., September 3-7, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Androgyny; *Evaluation Criteria; Factor Analysis; *Item Analysis; *Measurement Instruments; Psychological Testing; Research Projects; *Sex Differences; *Test Reliability
IDENTIFIERS *Bem Sex Role Inventory

ABSTRACT

In the development of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) the phrase "more desirable in American society" was used in the final item selection. To clarify whether subjects tended to interpret this phrase normatively or prescriptively, a sample of 432 college men and women used the items of the BSRI to describe either a typical (normative), desirable (as in the Bem), or ideal (the prescriptive should) man or woman. The results indicate that the items selected by Bem seem to represent what subjects believe should characterize a woman or man in our society rather than what typically describes them. Recommendations are made for using the masculine and feminine components of the androgyny score in addition to the androgyny score itself. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED137651

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, September, 1976, Washington, D.C.

Clarification of the Bem Sex Role Inventory

Lucia A. Gilbert
Department of Educational Psychology
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712

Robert F. Strahan
Department of Psychology
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa 50010

Connie J. Deutsch
Central Iowa Mental Health Center
Ames, Iowa 50010

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CG011236

Abstract

In the development of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) a potentially ambiguous phrase "more desirable in American society", was used in the final item selection. To clarify whether subjects tended to interpret this phrase normatively or prescriptively, a sample of 432 college men and women used the items of the BSRI to describe either a typical (normative), desirable (as in the Bem), or ideal (the prescriptive should) man or woman. The results indicate that the items selected by Bem seem to represent what subjects believe should characterize a woman or man in our society rather than what typically describes them. The ambiguity of the term "desirable" appears to be unique to females describing a woman's masculinity where "desirable" corresponds neither to normative nor prescriptive definitions. Moreover, recommendations are made for using the masculine and feminine components of the androgyny score in addition to the androgyny score itself.

Purpose

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) appears to be a highly welcomed instrument to both applied and academic psychologists, being the first of its kind to treat masculinity and femininity as conceptually independent dimensions as opposed to the traditionally single, bipolar one (Constantinople, 1973). The heuristic value of the Inventory is already being demonstrated through the work of Bem (1975) and others (e.g., Hill, Note 1).

Although we found the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to be useful in our own research (Deutsch & Gilbert, in press; Gilbert, Strahan, & Deutsch, Note 2), a phrase used in its item selection, "more desirable in American Society", was of concern (Strahan, 1975). More specifically, the final set of items for the Masculinity and Femininity scales were selected by asking subjects to judge whether each item was "more desirable in American society for one sex than the other," using a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (not at all desirable) to 7 (extremely desirable). Each judge rated the desirability "for a man" or "for a woman." Those items that were judged as significantly more desirable for one sex than for the other were assigned to the two scales.

We were unclear as to whether Bem's subjects generally construed this phrase prescriptively or normatively--and whether individual subjects differed in their constructions. That is, when the subjects were judging each characteristic, were they thinking of what ideally should characterize a woman or man in our society, or were they thinking of what should characterize a woman or man in order that she or he conform to social norms.

For example, one might feel that (from society's view) ideally a woman in our society should be (and be able to be) "ambitious." At the same time, one might also consider it desirable (from society's viewpoint), given the nature of our present society, that, either for her own good or society's, or both, it is not desirable for a woman to be ambitious.

In an attempt to provide clarification on this point, subjects were asked to use the BSRI items to rate a typical, ideal, or desirable (in parallel to the development of the BSRI) woman or man.

Method

Subjects and Design

During January, 1975, (432) female and male introductory psychology students completed a sex role inventory in return for course credit. Male and female students were each randomly assigned to a single cell in a 2 (Subject Sex) by 2 (Target Sex) by 3 (Condition) factorial design. Subjects were run in groups of five to fifteen individuals, with no interaction permitted among subjects.

Sex Role Inventory

The BSRI's (Bem, 1974) items were used, 20 forming the Femininity (F) scale, and 20 the Masculinity (M) scale. The F and M scales were each divided by 20, the number of items comprising these scales, so that scores would be in terms of the seven-point item format (1, not at all true, to 7, extremely true). Other measures derived from the BSRI

were (a) the Androgyny difference score (F-M), Femininity scale score minus Masculinity scale score and (b) the Androgyny t-ratio, the Androgyny difference score divided by a term reflecting the variability of a subject's item ratings within each of the Femininity and Masculinity scales. It should be noted that results from the Androgyny t-ratio are not reported here: Previous criticism of this measure (Strahan, 1975) as well as the finding in this study that two subjects had out-of-the-distribution t scores (resulting from the combination of large Androgyny difference scores and very small Variability scores) formed the basis for this decision.[1] In general, the Androgyny t-ratio and Androgyny difference score were found to be highly correlated (r ranged from .92 to .99) and to yield similar results.

The instructions for each of the three administrative conditions of the sex-role inventory paralleled as closely as possible the wording used by Bem. Briefly, these instructions were:

Typical: Describe what a typical woman (man) in our society is like.

Desirable: Describe what is desirable for a woman (man) in our society.

Ideal: Describe what a woman (man) in our society should be like.

Each subject completed the BSRI under one set of instructions for either a man or a woman.

Results

Tests of Means

Although the design of this study was in factorial analysis of variance format, such analysis was not seen as optimal for the purposes of means analysis. A priori interest lay, within each Subject Sex-Target Sex combination, in comparisons among the three administrative Conditions, rather than in examination of main effects and interactions. (Although Subject Sex and Target Sex means within each Condition were also compared, these findings are not reported here as they are tangential to the purposes stated earlier.) Consequently, comparisons among means were made directly. In recognition of the collective alpha error problem posed by so many comparisons, Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) method was used rather than ordinary *t*-tests.

Notwithstanding this analytic rationale, factorial analysis of variance were nevertheless computed, in order to obtain conveniently error terms for the Tukey comparisons and for the benefit of readers who might wish them available. Subjects were nearly equal in number in each of the 12 cells (34 to 36), and unweighted means analyses were performed.

The Androgyny difference score and its components

For the Androgyny difference score, Subject Sex and Target Sex were significant (respectively, F (1, 417) = 15.29, $p < .001$, and F (1, 417) = 289.54, $p < .001$, as were the Target Sex by Condition interaction, F (2, 417) = 12.54, $p < .001$, and Subject Sex by Target Sex, F (1, 417) = 6.72, $p < .01$. The triple interaction, Subject Sex by

Target Sex by Condition, also achieved significant, F (2, 417) = 3.53, $p < .05$. The mean values are portrayed in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Comparing across the three conditions, Tukey's HSD procedure showed the following results (here and throughout the results section differences are significant beyond at least the .05 level). Females rated a man as typically lower in F-M than either how he should be or than is desirable. They also felt that a woman should be lower in F-M than either she typically is or than is desirable. For male subjects, on the other hand, no differences were found in the ratings for the three conditions for either a man or a woman suggesting that the typical, desirable, and ideal man are all sex-typed in the masculine direction (F-M $< -.5$) as are the respective women in the feminine direction (F-M $> +.5$).

Clarification of these F-M findings was sought through examination of the separate Femininity and Masculinity variables (Figure 2). For Femininity, Target Sex and Condition were highly significant, respectively, F (1, 417) = 154.98, $p < .001$, and F (2, 417) = 26.32, $p < .001$. The interaction between these factors was significant as well, F (2, 417) = 9.50, $p < .001$.

Insert Figure 2 about here

In contrast to the findings reported for F-M, comparisons across the three conditions found: (a) the sexes to be in agreement that a man

typically is lower in F than he should be or than is desirable, and (b) male subjects felt it desirable for a woman to be higher in F than typically she is. It may be of importance to note one further contrast: The striking difference which appeared between females' F-M ratings of an ideal woman, on the one hand, and their typical and desirable ratings, on the other, were not apparent on the F dimension. Their ratings of F for a typical, desirable, and ideal woman were not statistically different.

A more complex pattern was seen for Masculinity (M). Here all three main effects were significant: Subject Sex, F (1, 417) = 40.49, $p < .001$, Target Sex, F (1, 417) = 146.48, $p < .001$, and Condition, F (2, 417) = 31.84, $p < .001$. Target Sex by Condition also reached significance, F (2, 417) = 4.66, $p < .001$.

Again in contrast to the findings for F-M, comparisons across the three conditions found: (a) male subjects to view a man typically lower in M than is desirable and than he should be and (b) both male and female subjects to view a woman typically less masculine than is desirable and than she should be.

Results and Discussion

What does "desirable" mean to college students when applied to the role descriptions of a woman and a man? For male subjects (Figure 2), desirable was generally comparable to should in ratings of the M and F characteristics for both a woman and a man. Hence, for males, the term

"desirable" appears to represent how a person should be rather than how a person typically is. This same interpretation appears to be true for female subjects' rating of a man. For females' ratings of a woman, however, the picture becomes less clear: desirable feminine characteristics are not very unlike either the typical or the should whereas desirable masculine characteristics differ significantly from those of both the other conditions, with desirable occupying an intermediate position between the ideal (higher) and the typical (lower).

Apparently, then, college students, particularly males, tend when evaluating stereotypic personality characteristics to interpret "desirable" to mean "should" rather than "typical". Thus the items selected by Bem seem to represent what subjects believe should characterize a woman and a man in our society rather than what typically describes them. Second, the ambiguity of the term "desirable" appears to be unique to females describing a woman's masculinity where "desirable" corresponds neither to normative nor prescriptive definitions. We hope future researchers will be mindful of these findings in interpreting results from the BSRI.

A second issue regarding interpretation of the BSRI scores is pointed up by our results--the importance of investigating the individual M and F components of the Androgyny score as well as the Androgyny score itself. Comparison of the F-M means across the three conditions (Figure 1) presents a somewhat different picture from comparisons of the individual F and M means (Figure 2). In contrast to the findings summarized above, for F-M

we see that for males describing either a man or a woman, no differences are apparent, whereas for females desirable is comparable to ideal for a man, but comparable to typical for a woman.

In conclusion, our results provide greater clarity to what the BSRI purports to measure and point up the utility of using the masculine and feminine components of the Androgyny difference score in addition to the Androgyny score itself.

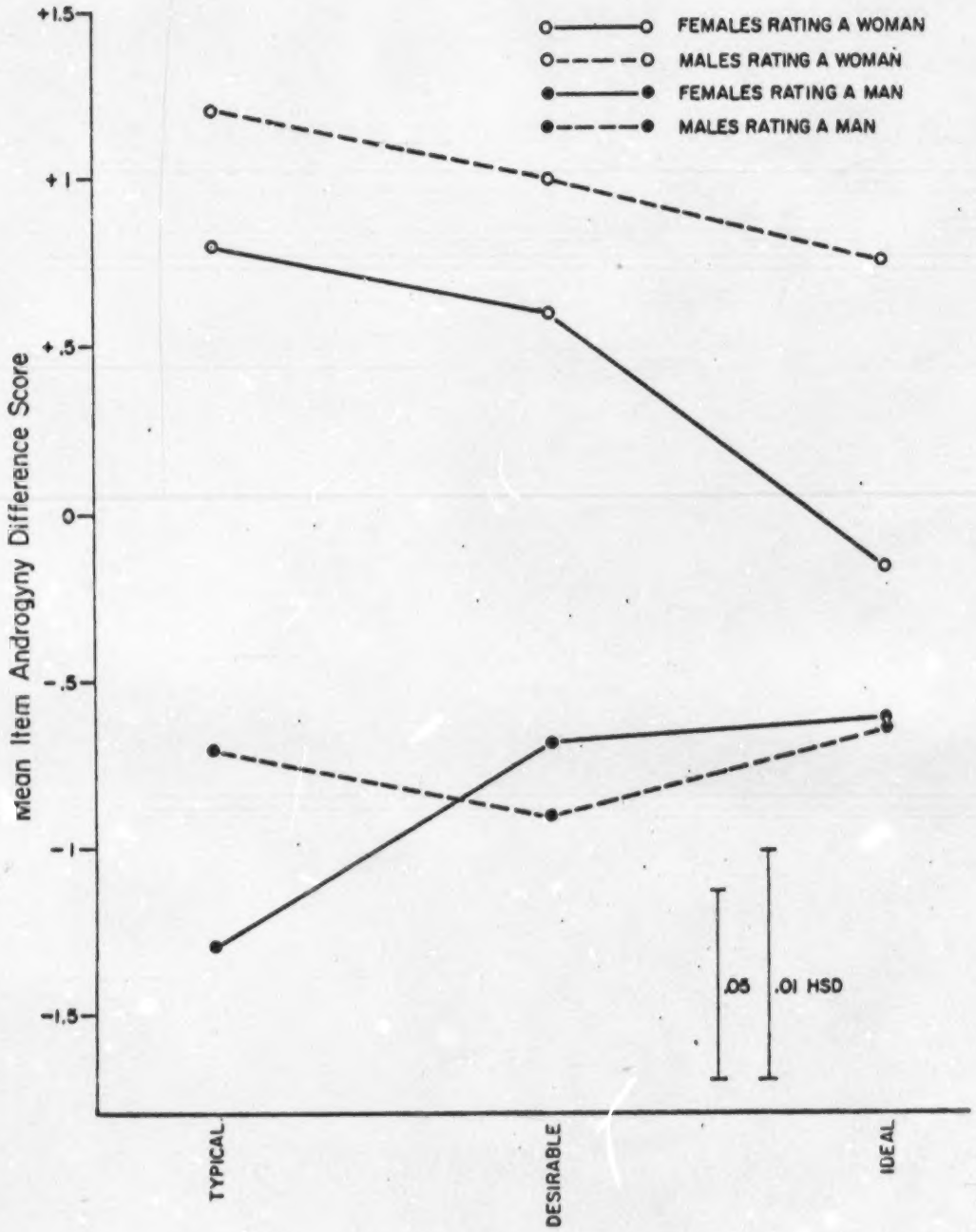

Figure 1. Mean item values of the Androgyny difference score for a woman and a man. Higher values, regardless of sign, are associated with greater sex-typing. HSD = Tukey's Honest Significant Difference.

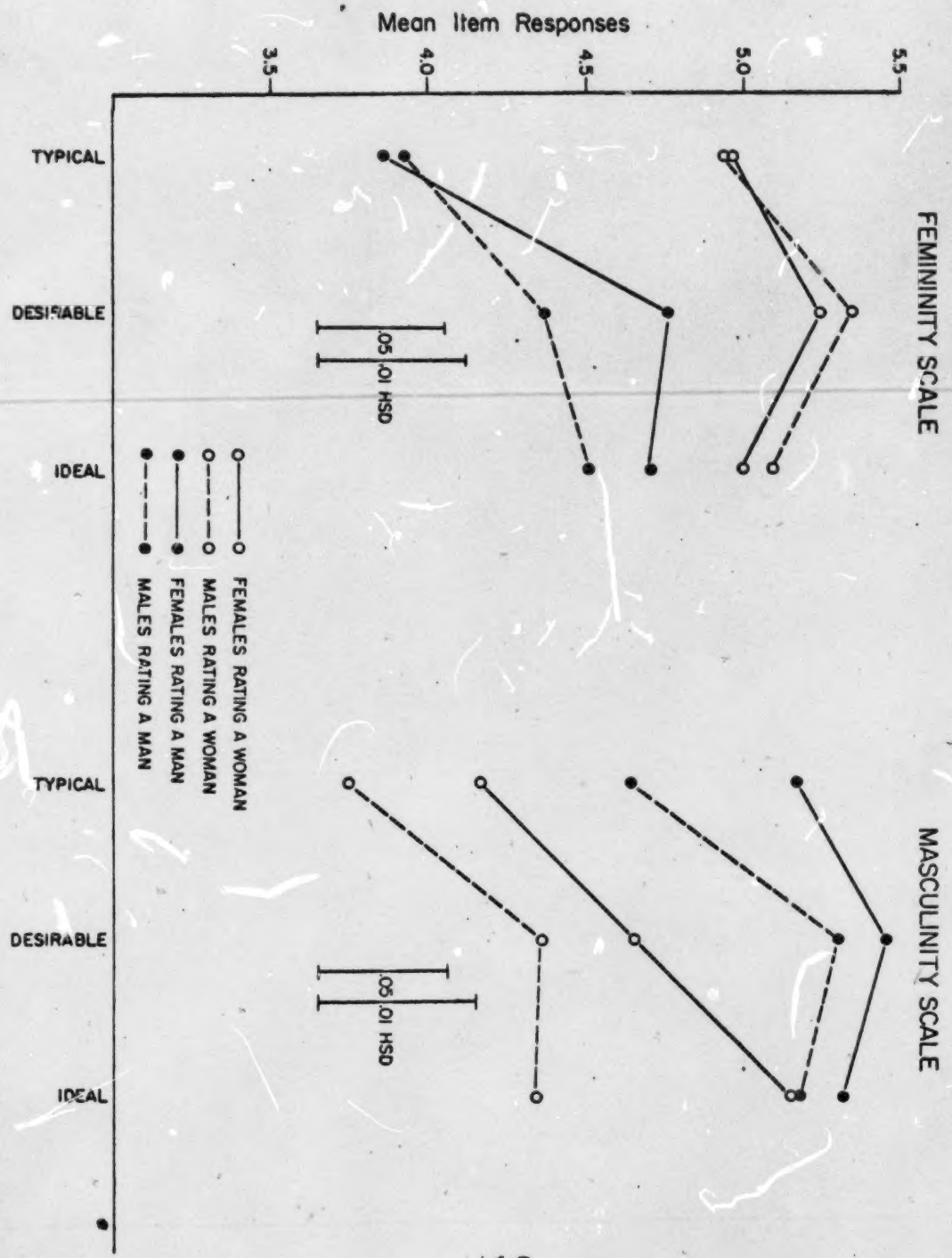

Figure 2. Mean item values of the Femininity and Masculinity scale score for a woman and a man. Higher values are associated with a higher endorsement of the respective sex-typed attributes. HSD = Tukey's Honest Significant Difference.

Reference Notes

Gilbert, L.A., Deutsch, C.J., and Strahan, R.F. Sex role descriptions: Feminine and masculine components of the typical, desirable, and ideal woman and man. Manuscript in preparation.

Hill, C.E. (Chair) Applications of the Androgyny Scale in research. Symposium presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, August 1975.

References

Bem, S. The measurement of psychological androgyny. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1974, 42, 155-162.

Bem, S. Sex-role adaptability: One consequence of psychological androgyny. Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 1975, 31, 634-643.

Constantinople, A. Masculinity-femininity: An exception to a famous dictum. Psychological Bulletin, 1973, 80, 389-407.

Deutsch, C.J. & Gilbert, L.A. Sex role stereotypes: Effect on perceptions of self and others, and on personal adjustment. Journal of Counseling Psychology, in press.

Strahan, R.F. Remarks on Bem's measurement of psychological androgyny: Alternative methods and a supplementary analysis. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1975, 43, 568-571.

Footnotes

[1] These *t* values for the typical, desirable, and ideal conditions, respectively, were as follows: male subjects rating a man, -1.84, -2.08, and -1.38; female subjects rating a man, -3.61, -1.44, and -1.24; male subjects rating a woman, 3.42, 2.42, and 1.69; and female subjects rating a woman, 1.96, 1.31, and -0.25.